

TUNNEL TRENCH

# TUNNEL TRENCH

*A PLAY IN THREE ACTS  
AND SEVEN SCENES*

BY  
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To

ATHENE SEYLER

FELIX DYMANT

TWO FRIENDS THE WAR GAVE ME

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow"

## **ACT I**

### **SCENE I**

A Flying Corps Mess in France, 8 p.m.  
September evening.

### **SCENE II**

Men's Dug-out in the line, 11 p.m.

## **ACT II**

### **SCENE I**

Flying Corps Mess. Dawn. Next morning.

### **SCENE II**

Army Corps Headquarters. 8 a.m.

### **SCENE III**

Flying Corps Mess. Late Afternoon.

## **ACT III**

### **SCENE I**

A Shell hole in between the lines. 11 p.m.

### **SCENE II**

Army Corps Headquarters. (G.O.C.'s sitting-room.)  
Midnight.

The action of the play takes place between early evening  
of one day, and midnight the next.

*Time*: September, 1918.

## ACT I

### SCENE I

*A Flying Corps Mess in France on a bright summer evening, about 8 o'clock. September, 1918.*

*It is a large, bare, white-painted hut, with carpets on the floor, table cloths on the tables, and diagram of aeroplanes and coloured supplements from "La Vie Parisienne" on the walls. The furniture is simple and makeshift, but the general appearance of the room is neither uncomfortable nor unclean. There is one large deal table, some chairs, some benches, a gramophone on a stand, and a couple of card-tables. A window at back looks out on to the aerodrome, seen in evening sunshine. Door (left) to outside; door (right) to kitchen.*

*[Two young men come in from the left.]*<sup>1</sup>

LIEUTENANTS SMITH and ST. AUBYN. *The first a boy of nineteen or twenty, the second a year or so older. SMITH wears slacks, a silk shirt, his tunic (with a Pilot's wings) open and his cap on the back of his head. He is tall, and cool and good-looking, the cherished product of a small English public school and a paternal rectory. ST. AUBYN is generally wilder looking. He is dark, easily excitable and rather neurotic. He wears breeches and puttees, an open tunic (with an Observer's wing), and no cap at all.*

*[SMITH crosses the room to look at the notice board, and touches an electric bell. ST. AUBYN throws himself lazily down in an armchair.]*

*[A BATMAN in shirt sleeves appears at a door on the right.]*

SMITH. What time are we feeding to-night, Grace?

GRACE. Not for half an hour yet, sir. Not till 8.30.

<sup>1</sup> Left and right from point of view of spectator:

ST. AUBYN (*nodding*). Here's a go!

SMITH. Yours! You're quite sure you weren't a fool to stay out when you might be home already? Of course everything quiet enough on the front . . . but one never knows.

ST. AUBYN. I knew what I wanted.

SMITH. Chances never come twice in this little war.

ST. AUBYN. That's why I wanted to stay on a bit now. Look here; we've said all this before. I don't *want* my long rest in England yet. I've got a fortnight's leave instead, and that'll do. Then I'll come back and we'll do another month together; and then, when your time's up as well—six weeks from now—we'll both go home. It's all too good to lose at the moment. Don't let's spoil it by arguing. (*Drinking.*) He put too much Italian in this; he always does.

[GAYTHORNE, a huge, untidy Canadian, comes into the room.]

GAYTHORNE. 'Evenin', gents.

ST. AUBYN (*mimicking an ultra-Canadian accent*). Say, guy, d'you know where all our jumped-up pack o' loafers is gone to? It's nearly ha'-after-eight.

GAYTHORNE (*looking at him with contempt*). I don't, stranger.

SMITH. Where's everyone, Bo'? Don't be a swine.

GAYTHORNE. Where you might guess, playin' tennis and sleepin', mostly. Have you mutts been down to the bathing pool?

SMITH. We have; and been lying asleep there all day.

GAYTHORNE. And I been lying asleep here. Gee, but it almost cost me my young life, though. I was lyin' asleep on the aerodrome by the edge of the roadside, when I near got a crack on the head from a staff limousine.

ST. AUBYN (*translating, to SMITH*). He means he was nearly run over by a staff car. What was it doing, Bo'?

GAYTHORNE. A General's whizz-wagon swerving up to the squadron office to tell us there's a battle in the morning, I *don't* think. Roberts and Deakin are playin' tennis, Sonny Carrington's asleep in his tent, and one or two of the boys have gone over to a poker school in "B" Flight.



ST. AUBYN. Peace on earth and good-will towards men!

GAYTHORNE. Sure! (*Going over to the notice board, to ST. AUBYN.*) Say did you get your letter from here this morning, Bill?

SMITH. I got it for him. And answered it. It was from your people, Bill.

ST. AUBYN (*languidly*). What did you say to 'em?

SMITH. I asked your mater to send us some more cigarettes. I told her her boy was well, but lazy. And I asked her to give your love to your girl.

GAYTHORNE. I'm damned if I'd stand for that.

ST. AUBYN. I've answered his letters for him before now. Haven't I, Smith?

GAYTHORNE (*giving it up*). Can yer beat it! You must be nutty on each other. (*Touching the bell.*) Shall we hit the booze, boys, till dinner comes on?

[*The BATMAN appears from the kitchen door and waits. A second later CAPTAIN CARRINGTON comes into the room from the left. He is a youth of about 24, fairly smartly dressed, buckling on a Sam Browne belt, and looking rather hot and worried.*]

CARRINGTON. Hullo, so you're here already. Good. Where are the rest?

SMITH. What's up, skipper?

CARRINGTON. Half a tic. (*To the BATMAN.*) Grace, go and dash round and find as many people as you can. Tell them to come along here—sharp. People of other flights as well, if you see any.

[*The BATMAN disappears.*]

ST. AUBYN (*protesting*). I say, before dinner?

CARRINGTON. Get those idiots who are playing tennis, Gaythorne.

[*GAYTHORNE goes out.*]

You just back from the bathing pool? There's a sudden shine on about something or other. I don't know what. Redfern asked me to get hold of anyone I could, in here.

ST. AUBYN. They might have left us in peace till after food.

SMITH (*looking out of the window*). What car's that in front of the squadron office?

CARRINGTON. It's Bill's aristocratic friend, Digby's. He's come over from Corps Headquarters, and is in with Redfern now.

SMITH (*still at the window*). What's his trouble at this time of day?

CARRINGTON. I don't know—some idiotic new order from the Corps probably. Drill parades before breakfast for us; or (*looking at ST. AUBYN*) not walking about Abbeville as though we were trippers on Bank Holiday. Why can't you look as smart as your blessed pilot, Bill?

ST. AUBYN. Because I had two years in the infantry and got fed up with smartness, I suppose. Your own belt's twisted, Sonny.

[SMITH *helps* CARRINGTON *put his belt right*.]

CARRINGTON. Thanks.

[*He observes the new-comers who begin to file into the room, the two tennis players in white flannel shirts, and several more in shorts and without tunics. The average age of the youths is below twenty-one. Several of them are eighteen.*].

Yes, we do look a lot of sluts, when anyone comes over from the Corps to see us. But they shouldn't call these hot-air meetings just before dinner. Goodall!

ONE OF THE OBSERVERS. Yes, skipper?

CARRINGTON. Go and tell them not to bang about the crockery in the kitchen. The Major will probably have something to say. Sit down, the rest, and wait.

[*The OBSERVER goes out.*]

[*More people come into the room and sit down where they can. MAJOR REDFERN enters, older than the rest, about 28 or 30, followed by MAJOR DIGBY, a dapper little staff Officer with a slight limp, red tabs and a Corps armlet. Everyone stands up and throws away or stamps out cigarettes. DIGBY, as he passes, pokes ST. AUBYN in the ribs and says, "Hullo, Bill."*]

MAJOR REDFERN. Evening, everybody. Digby, you've met Carrington, who runs "C" Flight?

[DIGBY and CARRINGTON *shake hands*.]

You don't mind my pinching your room, Sonny, for

this business? It's bigger than the others. I asked Sandys to bring his people in here.

CAPTAIN SANDYS (*in the background*). Here, sir.

MAJOR R. How many have you got?

SANDYS. Four of them are still in the air.

MAJOR R. You, Sonny?

CARRINGTON (*looking round the room*). I think we're all here, sir. Gilray went on leave this morning.

MAJOR R. Fox?

CAPTAIN FOX. Most of my people are away, I'm afraid, sir.

MAJOR R. (*tolerantly*). They *would* be. Where?

FOX. Well, sir, all our jobs for the day were done by about four o'clock this afternoon; so I didn't see, sir (*in a tone of sweet reasonableness*), why they shouldn't all take a tender, and push off into Amiens and get some dinner.

MAJOR R. When'll they be back?

FOX. Not later than ten, sir. I said they must be in early.

MAJOR R. Will they?

FOX (*with sudden ferocity*). I told them I'd damn well stop their joy-riding for a month if they weren't.

MAJOR R. Good. You don't mind them smoking, Digby?

[MAJOR DIGBY *shrugs his shoulders and smiles*. All right then, sit down and smoke, but keep quiet.]

[REDFERN and DIGBY *sit down at the far side of the table*. The *Flight Commanders*, CARRINGTON, SANDYS, and FOX, *sit with them*, CARRINGTON *next to REDFERN*. The others *sit, mostly on the floor, and light cigarettes*.]

MAJOR R. (*to FOX*). I'll have to get hold of your devils, Foxy, and tell them about this later. See that they come to me when they come in. Will they be too canned to understand it?

FOX. I don't think so, sir. There was no talk of a pub-crawl.

MAJOR R. Good for them. Now I'll begin. (*Breaking off in annoyance*.) Can I oblige you with a match, Pudgy?

[*He looks at a small OBSERVER who has been agitating for a light for his pipe, and throws him a box of matches.*]

You're quite sure you're old enough for a pipe?

PUDGY (*throwing the matches back*). Thanks, sir. Quite.

MAJOR R. Good. (*Clearing his throat, speaking briskly to the whole company, he begins.*) It will no doubt surprise most of you to learn what I've come here to tell you now: there's going to be a battle.

[*General quickening of interest.*]

It's news, in fact, to all of us. There's been no intensive artillery preparation along the whole of our front for the last ten days to tell the Huns all about it, and it has not been the subject of conversation in London drawing-rooms for the past month. All of which is a novelty. It is going, in fact, to be a surprise battle. It begins to-morrow.

ST. AUBYN (*sitting up and taking notice*). When's it going to end?

MAJOR R. The particular point about it is, that it's not going to end.

ST. AUBYN (*Subsiding*). Gawd!

MAJOR R. My friend Bill seems a bit anxious about his leave, which we are all aware falls due on Thursday. I think he will probably get it. There's no talk of general leave being stopped, is there, Dig?

MAJOR DIGBY (*shakes his head slowly. There is a sigh of relief from more than Bill*).

MAJOR R. Leave will not, apparently, be stopped; neither, however, will the battle. It is, I think I am right in saying, a battle with unlimited objectives. Major Digby will correct me?

[MAJOR DIGBY *nods*.

In other words, we're going to have one more shot at going right through. It's going to be on a much bigger front than merely our own. I dare say you've seen guns pulling out from our Corps front and going north. That's all right. They'll come in later. The troops in our sector put up their own particular show to-morrow. No one else has heard anything about it except the actual

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infantry in line who are down to perform, and some of the gunners. The battle for the first two days will be more or less ordinary.

CARRINGTON. Ordinary?

MAJOR R. Ordinary trench attack for the infantry; and ordinary from our point of view. That is to say, Sonny and "C" Flight will do most of the contact patrol, and the others will sit about and watch. There won't, except for the first day, be quite such a heavy barrage as usual for us to fly through.

CARRINGTON. Thank God for that.

MAJOR R. After that, when the Infantry get out into the open, everyone will do contact patrol, all the time. It will be our entire business to see how far the Infantry have got, wherever they have got. It will become, they hope, something like open warfare; and it's up to us to do the best we can in the new conditions. Zero-hour to-morrow is at 5.30 a.m.

CARRINGTON (*thoughtfully*). My first contact patrol had better get off the ground at about ten past five, then.

MAJOR R. Who'll you send?

CARRINGTON. I should think, sir . . . O'Brien and myself had better do the first flip.

MAJOR R. I'll want you to hang about on the ground for a bit to take charge if I'm called away.

CARRINGTON. Smith and St. Aubyn, then.

MAJOR R. All right, good. (*To the two.*) Come to the office after dinner, and I'll go over your maps carefully with you. (*To CARRINGTON.*) You'll have to keep patrols up in the air all day, Sonny, and it'll probably mean two jobs each for all your flight. (*Pause, to the company again.*) A large scale map with all the objectives for to-morrow marked on it will be up in the squadron office shortly. The "Green Line," that we ought to get first go off, is the enemy front line trench. The "Red Line," that we ought to be on by about seven o'clock, includes all their first trench system. Afterwards, in a few days' time, they'll put up a show north of us; and at the same time as that there'll be another push down south of us. And after that, with any luck, the whole line ought to move forward, and the genuine business

ought to begin. But that doesn't concern us yet. I merely mention it to lend stimulus to my otherwise unexciting narrative. (*Pause.*) Incidentally, if we move forward out of this hole, it'll be goodbye to our potato-sack tennis court, and miles further away from Abbeville and our bathing pool. Amen! Major Dig., armed with authority from Corps Headquarters, would probably now like to take the floor.

[MAJOR DIGBY gets up, and there is some clapping.

MAJOR REDFERN'S statement is felt to have been brief, well phrased, and illuminating.]

MAJOR DIGBY (*hesitating*). Major Dig. wouldn't, but he'll have to, as Major Redfern has asked him. . . . Gentlemen—er, laddies—I've been sent by the Corps Commander to butter you up, and to say that we depend a lot on you in the future. I'll cut out the first part of it . . . ask you to excuse me the eye-wash . . . which you can take for granted. The point is . . . that in future, with the troops moving above ground, with no telephone wires, and with very difficult communication back to the rear, we—or, rather, the nobs who are controlling things—will rely very much upon you for all the information you can bring in, and for possibly our only knowledge of how far forward the troops have got. This business of what you call "contact patrol" isn't easy. You've taken me flying often enough, and how the devil you see anything accurately from the air, I don't know. The Chief merely wanted me to tell you . . . to ask you to believe . . . that on what you see, and on what news you bring back, may quite possibly, in this sort of stunt, depend the fate of divisions—and even of his whole blessed Army Corps. That's true. But you know most of it already. There's nothing more, I don't think, for me to say . . . except, "Good Luck."

[*He sits down. Silence.*

MAJOR R. Thanks, Dig. (*Looking round the room.*) Anyone anything to ask? (*Silence.*) The meeting is adjourned.

[*There is a short pause, and then a general rising.*

ST. AUBYN (*heard above the murmurs*). Well, I'm bloody well damned!

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GAYTHORNE (*also*). Say, Bo', he has said a mouthful.  
*[More murmur and some laughter.]*

SANDYS. Come on, chaps, let's leave "C" Flight alone to their dinner.

MAJOR R. Sandys.

SANDYS. Yes, sir?

MAJOR R. Flight Commanders come to me later, about ten o'clock.

SANDYS.

CARRINGTON. } Yes, sir.

FOX. }

*[General movement towards the door.]*

SMITH (*at the window, pointing out*). Look, there's Jackson on 17 bus coming in to land. I bet he crashes.  
*(He climbs slowly out of the window to look.)*

*[Others leave by the door.]*

MAJOR R. (*sniffing, as he goes out*). What have your flight got for dinner, Sonny? Coming, Dig?

CARRINGTON. Kidneys and bacon, I think, sir, to be original.

A VOICE FROM THE DOOR (*interestedly*). He is going to crash!

*[The room is left empty except for MAJOR DIGBY and ST. AUBYN.]*

ST. AUBYN. Dig!

*[He motions for him to wait a minute. Then goes across to the window and looks out and up, and mutters: "Silly fathead!"]*

Dig!

MAJOR DIGBY. Yes?

ST. AUBYN (*still at the window*). He's a cow, that man. He nearly crashes every time he lands. And landing in the half light is no joke. (*Turning.*) Dig!

MAJOR DIGBY. Yes?

ST. AUBYN. Is it going to be a very hefty barrage to-morrow morning? *[Pause.]*

MAJOR DIGBY. Pretty average, I think, to start off with.

ST. AUBYN. Flying through it one gets rocked about like a bit of paper in a windy street. (*Pause.*) D'you

know what the casualties were in the squadron just north of us, in the last big push four months ago?

MAJOR DIGBY (*uncomfortably*). I know they had bad luck.

ST. AUBYN. They started with thirty-six flying officers, just like us. After the push had been going on for a bit—after the first few weeks . . . the squadron had rather changed hands. There were two of the old ones left.

MAJOR DIGBY. Two?

ST. AUBYN. Two. Of course, the others weren't all done in. Some of them had got lightly pipped; one or two had gone home to England in the ordinary way for a rest. But the figure makes one think a bit. Two originals left out of thirty-six. So much for pushes! Half the kids here have never seen one. That's why they're so darned gay about it. Can you do something for me?

MAJOR DIGBY. What is it?

ST. AUBYN. Find out where my young brother Ronny is, will you? The one my father doesn't care about. He was pushed into the infantry—he's still a private—and I don't know what part of the line he's in now.

MAJOR DIGBY. He's in the 33rd Brigade.

ST. AUBYN. Eh? How do you know that?

MAJOR DIGBY. I do. But I don't know where the Brigade is now.

ST. AUBYN. Will you find out? Will you let me know?

MAJOR DIGBY. I will.

ST. AUBYN. He may not be in this show. I hope he isn't. The infantry have a worse time than we do, by a long chalk. Something else.

MAJOR DIGBY. What?

ST. AUBYN (*slowly*). If you see my people, as you will some time, tell 'em about me.

MAJOR DIGBY. My dear chap!

ST. AUBYN (*savagely*). Oh, I know, I know. Only the news of this push is rather a blow, and I'm not responsible for what I'm saying at the minute. It's been too good to last—this last whole blessed summer of idle-



ness, lying about in the sun, bathing, joy-riding. I'm not going to get through this time.

MAJOR DIGBY. My good boy . . . Bill. . . .

ST. AUBYN. Your good boy will have a piece of metal through his guts by this time to-morrow morning, as like as not, or be down in flames. (*A pause.*) Forgive my talking this sentimental bilge to you. I've got a bad moment on me. You're outside the squadron. Here, we don't say it. We all pretend to each other like hell; and things have been so slack lately that we've almost come to believe we'll all live to be as old as Methuselah. (*He stands with his hand on his stomach as if in physical pain.*)

MAJOR DIGBY (*not knowing what to say*). Have a drink.

ST. AUBYN. No thanks. (*He shakes himself and goes on more calmly.*) What else I wanted to say to you, is this; you know my pilot?

MAJOR DIGBY. Smith? A nice boy.

ST. AUBYN. Smith. If we both get pipped, write to his people as well. They're the simple country rectory sort, and they'd appreciate it. This is the address in Norfolk. Say something nice, and stamp it all over with Corps Headquarter's notepaper. They'll like that as well.

*[He goes nearer the window, and, in the fading light, writes on a slip of paper and hands it to DIGBY.]*

ST. AUBYN. If he doesn't come through, I don't care to come through myself, I don't think. I'm going to cancel my leave and stay out here with him till the push is over. I care about him more than anyone I've ever met in my life.

MAJOR DIGBY. More than Hermione?

ST. AUBYN (*after a second*). I think so. Much.

*[SMITH comes into the room.]*

SMITH. Hullo, it's as dark as the pit in here. Let's have some light.

ST. AUBYN. The switch has gone phut. I tried it.

SMITH (*shouting*). Grace!

Bring some candles, will you.

*[GRACE appears.]*

*[GRACE goes out.]*

Jackson got down all right ; with a filthy landing, as usual.

[*The three men look at one another, GRACE brings in several candles, sticks them in bottles or on to ledges with their own grease, lights them, and retires.*]

MAJOR DIGBY (*observing the two young men*). I'd better be slinging my hook back to the Corps. It's getting late, and there's work to do.

SMITH. Won't you stay and feed, sir?

MAJOR DIGBY. I'm sorry, I can't.

ST. AUBYN (*his hand on the bell*). A spot of something? Come on.

MAJOR DIGBY. No thanks, very much. My head's not strong enough for all the things you lad's brew here. So long.

SMITH and ST. AUBYN. Good night, sir.

DIGBY (*at the door*). By the by, as you're on the early flip to-morrow, one of you had better come across to the Corps as soon as you land, and make a personal report. Both, if you like. I'll ask Redfern to let you have a car. Goodbye.

[*He goes out. There is a pause.*]

SMITH. Well?

ST. AUBYN (*his mood suddenly changed to one of excitement*). We seem to be in it all right to-morrow. D'you like the feeling?

SMITH. I don't know.

ST. AUBYN (*coming close to him*). It's beginning to excite me. I didn't like it a minute ago. Now I do.

SMITH (*noticing his trembling*). Go easy, Bill. What a neurotic devil you are!

ST. AUBYN. We've got the first show. It isn't much more difficult than the later ones, and it's the star turn of the day. We want to bring it off decently.

SMITH (*thoughtfully*). The 18-pounder barrage is the thing to keep clear of. It'll be like a hail storm. I won't go down through it till you say we must. (*Pause.*)

ST. AUBYN (*changing ground*). What did you really say to my people to-day? You were civil, I hope.

[GRACE and another batman come in, bringing more candles, and spread the table cloth. SMITH is silent till they go.]

SMITH. I told them I'd pinched your letter, and that you'd be writing to-night. You'd have missed the post otherwise.

ST. AUBYN. I'll write a line after dinner. Are you writing to yours?

SMITH. I think so. *(Pause.)*

ST. AUBYN. Good. And then we can have our fun to-morrow with a free mind. *(He suddenly gives a shrill shriek of happiness.)*

SMITH. Easy, dear man. I don't see what you've got to be so darned excited about.

[The BATMAN returns to continue the laying. Several more of the flight come back, smartened up, with their hair brushed, and tunics on.]

GAYTHORNE *(going to the gramophone)*. What say to a little canned music, boys, till the eats come on?

ST. AUBYN. Let her loose, Buddy—if the infernal noise amuses you. It don't hurt me any.

[More members of the flight come in, the gramophone is started, and GRACE hands round a tray of glasses.]

*(Curtain.)*

## ACT I

### SCENE II

*A fantastic scene.<sup>1</sup>*

*It represents a dug-out in the line at 11 p.m. of the same night, but, inasmuch as both a group of English privates and of German privates are sleeping peaceably in it, divided only by a small methylated cooking stove, it can obviously be no dug-out that ever existed.*

*The English are on the right, the Germans on the left. The German corner of the dug-out is not yet illuminated.*

*The roof of the dug-out is about 5 feet high, so that no one can move or stand up without stooping. A narrow tunnel at the back and a flight of steps leads out to the upper air. The walls are clay, supported by beams or "frames." The tin hats and minor equipment of the occupants are strewn about the floor or hung on the walls. The men have their gas-masks in small haversacks slung on them.*

*One of the English privates, a thin, unhealthy-looking lad of just under twenty, is sitting up in the centre, keeping an eye on the stove and reading by the light of a candle. The rest of his compatriots and the Germans are asleep. When they come to sit up, it will be seen that all alike—English and Germans—their uniforms are thick with dust, chalk, and dried mud, and that their wearers are in the last stages of filth. Their hair is cropped close like convicts; their chins, being shaved and comparatively clean, emphasise in a startling way the grime, sweat, and dust that cakes the rest of their physiognomy. They are all, in these conditions, repulsively hideous. One of the English, a heavy man about 50, a little bald but with a bristling moustache, in private life a navvy, brings his sleep to a close with a loud*

<sup>1</sup> Probably played through a gauze:

*snore, and starts up on his elbow with a cry of terror, and a burst of profanity.*

THE NAVVY. Gawd! Gawd! Not that. Ach, not through there. Not that! (*He remains blinking and trembling, and looks up at the lad by the stove.*) Gawd, I've been dreamin'. What's the time, Cocky? Is it stand-to yet?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE (*looking at his wrist-watch*). It's just after half-past eleven. Six hours more for us!

THE NAVVY. Thank Gawd for that. Me an' Stoggs 'as got another guard to do at midnight. Thank Gawd it ain't termorrer yet. Right through the guts, 'e 'ad me, the swine. But I've been dreamin'. Five-firty termorrer. Over the top at five-firty termorrer—an' the best of luck. That's what done it, I expect. What yer cookin'?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. Some stuff I had sent out from home. Milk and cocoa cubes or something. It helps to pass the time. Want some?

THE NAVVY. No thanks, mate. That muck ain't no good to me. Gawd, it ought to be cool down 'ere—twenty foot deep in the earth—but it's as 'ot as 'ell. It's the fug we makes ourselves, I expect. Where's my Woodbines?

[*He feels for and lights a cigarette, having to bend his head over at a grotesque angle to save catching his moustache alight with the match. Looking to the other side of the dug-out, which for the first time becomes illuminated.*]

'O's that there? (THE MAN BY THE STOVE goes on reading.) 'O's that, Cocky? Kripes! It ain't Jerries, is it? Or am I dreamin' again? 'Ere, 'o is it, Cocky?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE (*without looking up*). They've been there some time.

THE NAVVY. What d'yer mean? "Some time?" "Been 'ere?" 'Ere, Fagin! (*kicking his neighbour with*

\* It is impossible literally to record the conversation of the ensuing scene, for with the exception of the speeches of Ronny St. Aubyn, the sentences and even the syllables of the men are punctuated by the use of two endlessly reiterated words—which are ugly in print and meaningless in speech, but which custom has made as automatic to them as the breath they draw.

The Germans, having no swear words, don't use any.

*his foot*). Gawd, I'm dreamin' bad. 'Ere, mean to say those is Boshes over there?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. Why shouldn't they be?

THE NAVVY (*much alarmed*). 'Ere, Fagin! Torrins! 'Ere, all of yer, look at that now! 'Ow did they get 'ere? Gawd strike me (*to THE MAN BY THE STOVE*), one 'ud think you were dreamin' as well, Dustbins, ter look at yer. They're Jerries. 'Ow 'er we ter get 'em out o' this?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. I don't see that we need. It isn't five-thirty to-morrow morning yet.

THE NAVVY. Yer don't see, don't yer? Let 'em stay 'ere an attack us afore we go over the top to attack them? Gawd's strewth! 'Ere, I must do it myself. (*He crawls over to the huddled group of Germans and hesitates, looking down at them.*) Kripes! they're all sleepin' like 'ogs. What's ter do with them? (*He pauses, and then gives the nearest a gentle push.*) 'Ere, Jerry, you ain't got no call ter be in 'ere at all.

THE NEAREST GERMAN (*waking*). What d'you say, Englishman?

THE NAVVY (*fiercely*). I says as you'd better barge out of this double quick. Afore we start on you. Or there won't be nothing left ter barge with. 'O the 'ell d'you think we are—buttin' in in our dug-out like this?

THE GERMAN. It isn't five-thirty to-morrow morning yet, Englishman.

THE NAVVY (*nonplussed*). Gawd, an' you've got the time of our zero-hour as well!

THE GERMAN (*sitting up*). Our officers told us if you attacked at all to-morrow morning it would be at five-thirty or thereabouts. There's never any choice of time for attacks, no variety. It always has to be just after night, and just before sunrise.

THE NAVVY. Blame me if you aren't right. Over the top an' the best of luck—it's always in the bleedin' dawn. An' all your pals?

THE GERMAN. You know you're going to fight us, and we know that we're expected to fight you—at five-thirty. But until that time we both know nothing's going to happen. We thought we'd come and sleep in here.

THE MAN BY THE STOVE (*indicating his saucepan*). Have some of this?

THE GERMAN. Thanks. (*Some is poured into a mug which he drinks gratefully.*) Have you some more? (THE MAN BY THE FIRE *refills the mug*, and THE GERMAN, *waking his companions, hands it to them. One or two of the English privates are now sitting up, supremely interested.*)

THE NAVVY. Gawd strike a light!

THE GERMAN. It's good stuff. Our rations are bad these days. Yours as well?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. Ours are pretty good, considering.

THE GERMAN. Ours aren't. Stew, of sorts, all the time. Thin, nasty filth this weather.

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. Have some more of this? My people sent . . . it got sent out from home, and might just as well get used up. It'll all have to be buzzed away to-morrow, anyhow.

[*He breaks some cubes into the saucepan and pours some water on top of them from a water bottle.*]

THE GERMAN (*interested*). Where d'you get your water from?

THE MAN BY THE STOVE. There's a chalk quarry with a spring just behind our support line. (*To THE NAVVY.*) Isn't that it, Williams?

THE NAVVY (*to THE GERMAN*). That's right, mate; brought up in petrol tins, it is. 'Ow d'you get yours?

THE GERMAN. We have soda water served out to us, as a ration.

THE NAVVY. Funny! Soda water! Then it don't stink of petrol, I expect?

TORRINS (*from the background, a little, stunted Jewish-looking man*). D'you 'ave quarter-master sergeants in your army?

(*Laughter.*)

THE GERMAN. We do. Ours is a good man. He doesn't pinch from us. He pinches for us from other battalions.

TORRINS. So does ours—a proper scrounger, 'e is, too. Do they crime you, your sergeants an' officers?

THE GERMAN. They're not as strict as yours, I don't

think. They come down pretty heavy if the rifles aren't kept clean. But they're not bad on the whole.

TORRINS. I thought as you was messed about all day long, an' your officers could 'it you in the face, pretty well, an' you say nothing. (*Sniffs.*) One lives an' learns. 'Ow often d'you get leave?

THE NAVVY. 'Ere, cheeze it, Jewey. Give the pore devil a chanst to take bref. (*To THE GERMAN.*) Are you from Tunnel Trench? 'As the wire been cut proper in front of Tunnel Trench that we're going for termorrer?

THE GERMAN. You'd like to know that, wouldn't you? If it has, we've got our wiring parties out to-night repairing it.

THE NAVVY. Yus, you *would* 'ave! 'Ere, you'd better know these blokes, if yer will go on sittin' 'ere an' jawing. This is (*indicating THE MAN BY THE STOVE*) Aubyn—Storbyn—Dustbins—whatever you like ter call 'im. 'E ought to go for an officer, because 'e ain't no good to us. But they won't 'ave 'im. 'E's too bad a private. 'E's got a brother an officer in the Flyin' Corps, an', as they're none of them any good, 'e ought to go there too. This is (*catching hold of TORRINS*) . . .

TORRINS (*much agitated*). 'Ere, I say, I say, man! Is these the Jerries what we've got ter fight termorrer?

THE NAVVY (*jerking him forward by the nape of his neck*). Come an' let me introjuce yer. It don't do no good to be afraid of 'em. 'Ere, this is Torrins, a little sheeny man what used to be clerk to a fish shop in the Mile End Road. 'E's a gentleman, too, Mister bloody Torrins. Yer see 'im?

[TORRINS *shakes hands and withdraws his own very quickly.*]

This is Johnny Fagin—'e was with me before the war—bricklayers' hodman. (*Looking round.*) The other pore devils is asleep, an' we'll let 'em sleep. Time enough tomorrow. What's your lot?

THE GERMAN. Pretty much the same as yours. I've been thirty years in the book-binding trade at Leipzig. This young man here (*he indicates a sharp-looking youth of about 19*) is a friend of mine and a student at the University—he'll be taken away in a day or two to become



a "Kadetten Offizier"—as you'd say, to get a commission. He's waiting for his papers to come through now. The rest are . . . I think one or two of them are in your own line of business. (*He pulls out a pipe and lights it slowly.*)

THE GERMAN YOUTH (*to* ST. AUBYN). You say you're going for a commission; or have tried for one?

ST. AUBYN. I can't get one now. I've done field-punishment.

THE YOUTH. Hard luck.

ST. AUBYN. I was a University student as well, like you. I didn't want a commission at first. I came in with this lot. But there were things I hadn't reckoned with. Some people can't keep smart.

THE YOUTH. I know what you mean.

ST. AUBYN. I couldn't shine my buttons and keep my kit in order, somehow it seemed to go against my training or intelligence or something—and I was always getting crimed. You know how it is—some people aren't born to be "good soldiers."

THE YOUTH. I know. I'm like that.

ST. AUBYN. And now I've had a go of field punishment out here—crucified up to a cart-wheel—I'll never get a commission. I'm just waiting . . . oh, till one gets a blighty, or gets pipped off, you know. It doesn't bear thinking about.

THE YOUTH. I know. It's hard luck. I could just keep my buttons clean enough. I thought I'd be called back to go on leave and become a "Kadetten Offizier" before the next battle began. But there's such a fuss about the attack you may be going to make to-morrow, that my warrant won't come through now. I'll have to wait till after, I suppose.

TORRINS (*suddenly, to the Germans collectively*). 'Ere, what's that green mean, on your shoulder-straps? Saxons?

THE ELDER GERMAN. Yes, we're Saxons.

THE NAVVY. Gawd, ain't we Saxons too—or supposed to be?

(*General laughter.*)

Ain't it a mug's game?

THE ELDER GERMAN. All this, Englishman?

THE NAVVY (*looking round the dug-out, thoughtfully, after a pause*). You done the same as us, I suppose?

THE ELDER GERMAN. Pretty much.

THE NAVVY (*slowly*). In . . . in gettin' ready for this show an' other shows? You sweated your hearts out these 'ot days, fillin' dry mud into sandbags to make parapets and parados—same as we woz doin'? Of course you woz. You carried 'eavy gas cylinders up to the front line till the poles they woz slung on bit into yer shoulders—same as us? You sweated on water fatigues an' ration fatigues, an' ammunition-carryin' fatigues an' bomb-carryin' fatigues, through miles of twisting, winding trenches, till yer lost yer way an' didn't know where yer woz goin', an' could 'ave sat down an' cried with tiredness? You done diggin' parties, an' wirin' parties, and buryin' parties, with the flies bitin' yer and the stink of dead like bad fish in yer nostrils from mornin' ter night and back again? Same as us? Yus, and at the end of it, 'ere we are face ter face, all complete, waitin' for zero termorrer. The ground's marked out an' the referee's engaged, and we're all just waitin' fer the whistle an' the kick off. Gawd 'elp us fer mugs. . . . (*He waits a little, and then goes on in rising rage.*) An' in all summers past, ter lead up to this, you've marched yer feet off on these blasted cobble roads, with route marches under a 'ot sun, with a pack so 'eavy you could 'ardly lift it, till yer 'wished yer bloody C.O. ridin' ahead on his 'orse would fall off an' die, an' let yer 'ave a 'alt? An' in winters' yer've stood in wet trenches till the skin was rotted off yer feet. An' summer *an'* winter yer've 'ad yer 'ead shaved like convicts, an' been eaten alive with lice, wherever yer were, wherever yer went? An' then, before battles like this, yer've stood in trenches an' been shelled—blasted—smothered, till the trench woz blown in on yer, and yer woz sick an' dizzy, an' the flesh of people yer knew woz bein' scattered on yer like bits o' cat's-meat, an' the earth round yer woz heavin' like the sea at Margate. Gawd's death, when yer think of it. . . .

THE GERMAN (*quietly*). And we've known all the time,

like you, that there is no hope, no hope. That one might survive one year, or two years, or three. But that it was like crawling up a drainpipe to death. If one got lightly hit, one would be sent back in the end to be hit again. And that in the end of all, one would be killed, at the end of one year or two years, or three; and left to rot in the sun or the rain, or buried in a foot of earth for a shell to come and dig one up. You've thought the same?

THE NAVY (*uncomfortably*). I 'adn't thought as fur as that.

THE GERMAN. Do you know why you've been doing all this?

THE NAVY. Do we know why we done it any more than you do? Ain't we as alike as two peas, in all we thinks an' fears and does an' 'opes about this bloody war? (*He thinks a long time and then is illuminated.*) Except as you 'as soda-water fer a ration, an' we as water out er petrol cans?

THE GERMAN. Except that you have water out of petrol cans and we have soda water. . . . What was it you said it was—a "mug's game"?

THE NAVY. An' I'll tell yer one thing else. We don't know it yet; you dont' know it. But *I* know it, an' it's true. It ain't war that's the worst thing, there's something else. . . . When you woz comin' through Belgium you woz swine—not as bad as they said you woz, but you woz bad. You 'ad 'em on the run, an' it went to yer 'eads, same as it always does. You 'ated the people that woz under-dogs when you woz top-dogs. But 'ave you 'ated us when we woz fightin' equal, all these years in trench warfare? 'Ave we 'ated you? Not when you palled up with us Christmas 1914; not when we're sittin' 'ere talkin' now. But listen ter this now. It's Gawd's 'oly bible truth. When we get you on the run—(*with terrible conviction*)—as we will one day—maybe in a week—maybe in a year from now; when it comes our turn to see red . . . as I'm alive, we'll lose our 'eads as well . . . we'll chuck bombs down yer dug-outs an' laugh . . . we'll baynet yer wounded . . . we'll get ter killin' yer fer the very love of killin'. . . .

Gawd knows why it is, but so it will be. 'Tain't, and won't be, our fault, but so it will be.

[*He relapses from this exalted vision, and there is a silence in the dug-out. A small boy of 18 in an English private's uniform comes down the stairway into the dug-out.*]

THE NAVVY. 'Ullo, Cockey, what are you doin' 'ere?

THE SMALL BOY (*taking off his pack and laying it down*). I . . . I don't know. (*To himself, muttering.*) I ought to have left all this beastly stuff outside, I expect.

ST. AUBYN. Hullo, Leetham.

[*THE SMALL BOY looks up and nods.*]

THE NAVVY. You're not going to stop 'ere?

LEETHAM. Yes. . . . I am. . . . I think so.

THE NAVVY. What d'yer mean, yer little fool? Yer, supposed ter be on ten per cents, ain't yer?

LEETHAM. Yes, but, Williams. . . .

THE NAVVY. Eh? Get out of 'ere before I push yer rotten little baby mug in fer yer. You don't want ter be 'ere now.

LEETHAM (*in agonised supplication*). I couldn't help it, Williams. I couldn't indeed. Don't ask me why, or laugh at me. I can't tell you. I've never been in an attack like this before. I'll be awfully afraid. When my name was read out to stay behind on ten per cents, I almost died with relief. But it didn't last. Perhaps . . . but to-night, back in the wagon-line, I felt I had to come. I slunk off and came up here. I . . . I've got to be in it to-morrow . . . to see what it's like . . . to see if I can *stand* it. For my own sake, you understand. If you send me back, I won't go. I just won't go. I won't.

ST. AUBYN (*understanding*). Lie down there, then, and try and get some sleep.

LEETHAM. I will. I've been four hours trying to find the battalion. I'm frightfully tired. (*He loosens his tunic at the neck, and curls up to sleep on the floor of the dug-out, using his pack as a pillow.*)

THE NAVVY (*contemptuously*). 'E'll learn better when 'e's seen a bit more. 'E must be out of 'is mind. (*Looking across at the corner where the Germans are. The corner is*

## TUNNEL TRENCH

*beginning to grow mysteriously dark.)* 'Ave you got any marching songs, Jerry?

THE GERMAN (*dreamily*). We mostly sing music-hall tunes on the march. A long time ago, before the war, when we were on manœuvres, we used to have a song—an old song—"Morgenroth. Morgenroth." "O Sky of Dawn, O Sky of Dawn, Thou lightest me forth to early death." Written by Hauff . . . a hundred years ago. But we don't sing that much now.

THE NAVVY. We got one, ain't we, boys? Shall we give it 'em? (*He begins to sing softly.*)

I want to go 'ome,  
 I want to go 'ome.  
 Whizz-bangs an' bullets are fallin' galore,  
 I don't want to go to the trenches no more.  
 Take me over the sea  
 Where the Alle-mans can't get at me;  
 Oh my! I'm too young to die.  
 I want to go 'ome.

[*The doleful chorus, softly taken up by the others, dies away. THE NAVVY looks across to the Germans' corner which is now quite dark.*]

THE NAVVY. Kripes! I thought there woz Jerries over there in that corner, and that we woz singin' them a song! I must have been dreamin' bad. Time enough, five-firty termorrer.

[*He composes himself for sleep like the rest. ST. AUBYN by the stove remains reading.*]

(*Curtain.*)

## ACT II

### SCENE I.

*The Flying Corps Mess next morning. Time, just after 4.30 a.m. Pitch dark outside.*

GRACE, untidy in slacks and shirt sleeves, is laying breakfast for two at a small table by the light of a couple of candles stuck in beer bottles.

*(All this Scene needs for its production is a quarter-stage—a couple of chairs and a table in front of a curtain.)*

[SMITH enters, carrying a leather coat over his arm. Serious and business-like.]

SMITH. 'Morning, Grace. I see you're on time. *(He throws his coat down on a chair.)*

GRACE. Four-thirty, sir, to the tick.

SMITH. What have you got?

GRACE. Eggs and bacon, sir, ready now, sir.

SMITH. Good. We've not got much time to spare. We'll need to get off the ground a few minutes after five. It's still as black as night outside. *(He shivers slightly.)* Also nippy.

GRACE. Mr. St. Aubyn ready, sir?

SMITH. He's out of his bath, and'll be across in a sec. Tell him to go ahead with breakfast when he comes. I'm just going across to the office to see if any late news has come in.

*[He goes out. The BATMAN shines a plate on his shirt-sleeves, whistles a bar or two, and brings two chairs up to the table. ST. AUBYN enters, also carrying a flying coat. Sleepy.]*

ST. AUBYN. 'Morning, Grace. Hell of an hour, isn't it! I always feel my face wants soleing and heeling when I'm up at this time. Ugh! *(He shivers.)* What's to eat?

GRACE. Eggs and bacon, sir.

ST AUBYN *(helpfully)*. Or . . . ?

GRACE. Or . . . or bacon . . . sir . . . and . . .

ST. AUBYN (*brightly*). Or bacon and eggs? As in the last ninety-and-nine mornings of this everlasting war. Let's have 'em. Where's . . . ? (*He catches sight of Smith's flying coat.*)

GRACE. He'll be back in a minute, sir. He left word for you to go ahead.

ST. AUBYN (*whistling and lighting a cigarette*). Get the kitchen alarm-clock, will you, and stick it here. Watches will be watches, and mine fell into the bathing pool the other day and has never been the same watch since. We mustn't be late.

[*GRACE disappears and St. AUBYN walks up and down, whistling. SMITH comes in.*]

ST. AUBYN. Any news?

SMITH. Nothing.

ST. AUBYN. What's it going to be like flying?

SMITH. I don't know. The air's absolutely dead at the minute, and the stars are still blazing away. It's still nippy outside.

ST. AUBYN. It won't be for long. It gets like a hot bath in no time, once the sun's up, these mornings. (*They sit down and begin to eat.*) D'you know "Tristan"?

SMITH. D'you mean the opera? I was taken to it once on leave, but I didn't make much of it.

ST. AUBYN. You wouldn't.

SMITH (*offended*). Beg pardon?

ST. AUBYN. Don't mench. Only it needs knowing damn well. I know it well. Only I didn't know I knew it as well as all that! Funny.

SMITH. What are you talking about?

ST. AUBYN (*preoccupied with his own reminiscences*). Awfully funny. As Grace was pulling me out of bed—suddenly a bit of it came back to me. A bit in the second act, the awakening scene. . . . I didn't know I really knew a note of it—that particular part. But, as Grace pulled me out and I saw it was time to get up—d'you know, suddenly the whole damn passage came back to me, not only the tune of it but the orchestration as well! (*Much interested in his own line of thought.*) I swear if I'd been a musician I could have written out

the orchestral score of it, bar for bar! And it's been going on in my head ever since. Miraculous!

SMITH (*unimpressed*). I don't know much about it. It may be all right. These eggs are a miracle of coldness.

ST. AUBYN. You're a sympathetic devil to tell these things to. (*Shouting.*) Grace!

GRACE (*appearing*). Yes, sir?

ST. AUBYN. Take this stuff away. I don't want it. If there's any marm., let's have it.

[GRACE takes his plate and goes out.]

SMITH. You'll make yourself sick if you go on smoking and eat nothing but marmalade! Look here—(*suddenly businesslike*)—if we're on the line by five-forty it ought to do. We want to have a look at what they call the Green Line, six o'clock; and drop messages at divisional headquarters. Then we can find out about the Red Line just before seven. That'll be the difficult part. And then we can flip back, and come down. Yes?

ST. AUBYN. He said it was the right sector, Tunnel trench, etc., that was the important part of the Red Line? And that the division would want to know about that as soon as possible?

SMITH. Yes.

ST. AUBYN. Good. Then we mustn't fool about too long over the rest. How long does it take us to get on the scene from here?

SMITH. Fifteen miles—about a quarter of an hour. The machine's out of the shed and I saw them put my tin seat into it. So we're all right for time.

ST. AUBYN. Did you hear Wesson's story of his tin seat last time he was doing contact patrol?

SMITH (*eating*). No. I know he got pipped.

ST. AUBYN. He got shot up pretty badly—I met him on leave last time I was in England—and partly, he thinks, owing to his tin seat. He told me the story of it. He got hit when he was flying low, and the bullet knocked a great lump of the armour plate into his leg. He brought himself down all right; and was taken to a Field Dressing Station. He asked if he could have a little morphia or something and they said to him, "Have you had any breakfast this morning?" He said, "Yes,



tons." And they said: "Sorry, no morphia for you." Then, he said, they took him back about twenty miles in a motor ambulance, in frightful agony, and when they next stopped he said to the new people: "Can I have a little morphia?" and—just as he saw that they were going to say, "Have you had breakfast this morning?"—very quick—before they could get the words out of their mouths—he said, "No I haven't, I haven't had bite or sup for forty-eight hours. Damn it, give me my morphia." And they gave him his morphia. And after that he was all right.

SMITH (*uncomfortably*). Is this a moral story?

ST. AUBYN. I thought it would cheer us both up a bit.. That's why I told it. D'you know Swinburne?

SMITH (*sourly*). No. What squadron's he in?

ST. AUBYN. He isn't in a squadron. He's with God. But always, in the early morning, those fields in between here and the line remind me of a thing of his—with the dawn upon them—empty of colour. . . . D'you remember the last contact we did from here?

SMITH. In April?

ST. AUBYN. Yes. Getting off the ground as early as this, and watching the smoke begin to come out of the farm-house chimneys, and seeing the fields stretch away and away into the distance, grey and flat in the half-light like an inland lake. (*He begins to declaim.*)

"Does the dim ground grow any seed of ours,

The faint fields quicken any terrene root,

*In low lands where the sun and moon are mute*

And all the stars keep silence. . . ?"

(*more and more excited.*) You know; just like now, when the stars go dead and there's absolutely nothing showing at all. It's from the "Hymn to someone or other," I think.

SMITH (*impressed, in spite of himself, by the poetry*). Have you done talking this awful muck? Look here, it's about time to start. Come on.

ST. AUBYN. Half a minute. (*Shouting.*) Grace!

GRACE (*at the door*). Yes, sir?

ST. AUBYN (*to SMITH*). What time'll we be back here finally?

SMITH. We ought to have polished off everything, and satisfied their curiosity at the Corps, by about nine o'clock.

ST. AUBYN. Nine? All right. Have baths ready for us then, Grace, and some more breakfast. I've made but a poor meal—probably been talking too much. I'll be peckish by then. Come on, laddy.

*[They go out, and GRACE starts to clear away the breakfast.]*

*(Curtain.)*

## ACT II

### SCENE II

*The General Staff Office of the Army Corps a couple of hours later, about 7.30 a.m.*

*One of a series of huts built in the grounds of a château ten or twelve miles behind the lines.*

*It is a large plain room similar to the Flying Corps Mess (in production the same stage set could be used), but with no carpet, a few bare tables littered with papers, and maps instead of frivolous pictures on the walls. Many more maps also on easels and stands. (All these maps are of the same section of the front line—some relief maps, some plain, some showing our own divisions in line, some the German divisions. The largest of all, displayed prominently so that the audience can see it, has a bold green line drawn along the German front line trench, and a similar red line along their reserve trench.)*

*On the right is a door to the Chief-of-Staff's room.*

*It is by now a brilliantly sunny morning outside.*

MAJOR DIGBY is sitting at a table going through documents, taking them methodically from an "In" basket, reading them, and passing them across to the "Out" basket.

*[An outer door opens and a YOUNG OFFICER, very sleepy, comes in.]*

YOUNG OFFICER. Good morning, sir.

DIGBY (snappishly). Why the hell aren't you down here before this?

YOUNG OFFICER. "Why!"

DIGBY. You're aware, I suppose, that there's a battle on?

YOUNG OFFICER. A what? Then it is a battle after all?

DIGBY. I should have thought you might have heard it.

YOUNG OFFICER. Good Lord, I did. The din woke me up hours ago, at about five o'clock, but I thought it was only a Chinese barrage and that nothing was happening. (*Pettishly.*) How on earth was I to know that actual zero was to be to-day if nobody told me?

DIGBY. Get across to the Gunners' Office and see if they've had any messages in.

YOUNG OFFICER. Has anything come through to us yet?

DIGBY. Nothing yet. Except that they went over the top a couple of hours ago. Nothing.

[*The YOUNG OFFICER goes out. GENERAL LLOYD, the Chief-of-Staff, comes in from his room. He is a tall, spare man, about 50, dark.*]

GENERAL LLOYD. Good morning, Digby.

DIGBY. Good morning, sir.

GENERAL LLOYD. Nothing yet?

DIGBY. Nothing.

GENERAL LLOYD (*walks up to one of the maps and with his arms clasped behind him and, his back to the audience, gazes down upon it.*)

(*Long silence.*)

This waiting's pretty bad.

DIGBY (*looking up from his work at the brilliant early morning sunshine outside*). They've got a good morning for it.

GENERAL LLOYD. Marvellous. (*He also looks out.*) The lawns and lakes and the château itself are looking lovely this morning. What is it that smells—the lime-trees?

[*A DISPATCH RIDER, dusty from a motor-cycle, knocks at the door, enters, and hands an envelope to MAJOR DIGBY, who glances at the time and hands him a receipt.*]

DIGBY (*opens the envelope, glances at the message, and passes it to GENERAL LLOYD. Then, to the DISPATCH RIDER*). Has the Chief got this?

DISPATCH RIDER. General Mallory, sir?

[*DIGBY nods.*]

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A copy of it's gone up to the château, sir.

DIGBY. Right.

[*The DISPATCH RIDER goes out. Pause.*]

DIGBY. Nothing much. It's very late in coming.

GENERAL LLOYD (*reading, and looking over at the big map*). "The Green Line, 6.20." Yes; that's hours ago. They should have got the Green Line by then. Half-past seven now. They should be on the Red Line by this—should have had it some time. Tunnel Trench and the Schwaben Redoubt—the right sector. It's the one big risk.

DIGBY. Two battalions are going for it.

GENERAL LLOYD. I know. The Twenty-Seventh Division couldn't put more on to it. But it's the one big difficulty. The rest . . . should not have been difficult (*he gives a short, harsh laugh*), except for casualties and that sort of eye-wash.

[*A pause. GENERAL LLOYD goes back and resumes his position in front of the map, obviously intensely nervous and strung up.*]

DIGBY. The Chief out riding?

GENERAL LLOYD. I think so.

DIGBY (*rather sarcastic*). He's got a good morning for it.

GENERAL LLOYD. He's right. Neither he nor I nor anyone else back here can do any mortal good until things have sorted themselves out. Until we know how far they've got at the end of the day, and see what's left to be done to-morrow. To-morrow! What's the use of us here! We might as well be away on leave, or in hell. He's lucky to be able to go out riding and forget it for a bit. But I can't! What a morning for it all! Do they like it better being killed on a day like this, or in some filthy winter snow storm?

[*Another DISPATCH RIDER comes in.*]

DISPATCH RIDER (*to DIGBY*). Two messages, sir.

DIGBY (*receiving*). Have they gone up to the château?

DISPATCH RIDER. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

DIGBY (*reading*). "First telegram confirmed." That's a bit old by now. (*Reading the other.*) "Left and Centre

Divisions on Red Line 7.10." That's good. That's what you wanted. Part of it, at least.

GENERAL LLOYD. But nothing about the Right Division—Tunnel Trench and Schwaben? Have the Twenty-Seventh got them? When shall we *hear*? But we can't expect to hear yet.

*[The telephone on DIGBY's table rings.]*

DIGBY (*flurried*). Goddam! Hullo, hullo! (*He waits.*) Hullo. (*He waits.*) Hullo. Right (*To GENERAL LLOYD.*) It's from the Squadron, the flying people. It'll be Redfern. (*To the telephone.*) Hullo. Yes. Yes. It's Dig. Yes. The Green Line? Yes; we know that. The Red Line?—especially the Right sector—the bit the Twenty-Seventh are going for? Yes? Yes? (*suddenly dejected*). Oh, God! Wait a minute. (*To GENERAL LLOYD.*) "Doubtful! Doesn't know."

GENERAL LLOYD. Here! (*He snatches the receiver from DIGBY.*) General Lloyd speaking. Tunnel Trench. Tunnel Trench. What about it? . . . What were the indications, then? Who was shelling it? "Someone was shelling Tunnel Alley?" Wait a minute. (*He thinks.*) Who of your people was doing the contact patrol? Sending him here? Good. Good. "Confirms that Left and Centre divisions are holding their part of the Red Line"? Good. Good. Good. (*He slowly hangs up the receiver. Then thinking, and looking at the big map.*) If Tunnel Alley's being shelled, it may be they're shelling it because we're in it; or it may be us shelling it because they're in it. If we're held up there a long time. . . . Do you know who've been doing the contact patrol?

DIGBY. A boy called Smith and a boy called St. Aubyn.

GENERAL LLOYD. You know 'em?

DIGBY. One of them.

GENERAL LLOYD. How much can one really see from the air? Enough to be reliable?

DIGBY. It depends. If they go rather low they get caught in our barrage, and if they go underneath that they get shot at from the ground. It's partly experience, partly luck. Some of 'em seem to manage.

*[A CLERK comes in and lays a telegram on DIGBY's table.]*

DIGBY. Thanks.

[*The CLERK goes out.*]

A report on the number of trains seen going into Cambrai railway station last night. Hardly relevant at the moment.

GENERAL LLOYD. Number unusual?

DIGBY. About ordinary. (*Listening.*) That's probably them, the squadron car.

[*There is the sound of a car being drawn up on the gravel outside, and a moment later ST. AUBYN comes into the room, very flushed and excited and pleased with himself, still carrying a leather flying coat over his arm.*]

ST. AUBYN (*rushing up to DIGBY*). Hullo, Dig. What cheer! (*perceiving GENERAL LLOYD*). I beg your pardon, sir.

DIGBY. This is General Lloyd. Have you got much to say?

ST. AUBYN (*excitedly*). We had a ripping time . . . but you don't want to hear that. About Tunnel Trench, I don't know. That's the point, isn't it? Someone's up taking a look now.

GENERAL LLOYD (*eagerly*). You can't say anything definite?

ST. AUBYN. Only guesses, sir, about that.

GENERAL LLOYD. You've told all you know to Harwood, the 27th Divisional Commander?

ST. AUBYN. Yes, sir.

GENERAL LLOYD. What was it?

ST. AUBYN (*drawing folded maps and scraps of paper from his pocket*). It was this, sir, vaguely. I and Smith got on the line 5.40, just after zero. There was a terrific barrage going on—the best I've ever seen. Marvellous! We waited about a bit, and then went down to look at the first objective. We'd got that right along, certain, 6.20. So we went back and dropped messages saying so on Divisional headquarters. Then we went back to look at the Red Line. The Left division and Centre division had got their part of it, that I swear to. Time 7.15, or so. The Right division was doubtful.

GENERAL LLOYD. What could you see?

ST. AUBYN. Not much. Our people here (*indicating map*) just *this* side of Tunnel Trench, hanging about in shell holes. Terrific shelling of Tunnel Alley, 7.15, either by them or by us I don't know. Our people here (*indicating map*). We got heavily shot up from Schwaben Redoubt, 7.17, so I suppose the Huns were still there. Smith didn't think the shooting came from the redoubt, but I did.

[GENERAL MALLORY, a heavy, slow-moving man of about 60, enters the room quietly.]

GENERAL LLOYD (*nervously, to ST. AUBYN*). Couldn't you . . . couldn't you make certain?

ST. AUBYN (*looking round at GENERAL MALLORY*). Good morning, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. Go on, my boy. (*Taking out a small gold cigarette case, and helping himself.*) Dare I offer you one? They're only "ration."

ST. AUBYN. Er . . . thanks, sir. 7.25, we went back up the Red Line for luck; and then we thought we'd have a dash right down low over Tunnel Trench and Schwaben to make certain and . . .

GENERAL MALLORY. Then?

ST. AUBYN. No good, sir. Just as we really came within range of seeing what was up, we got a bullet, ping! on our engine, and as it took one of the rocker-arms away, we thought we'd better come home. (*To DIGBY.*) Gaythorne and Pudgy are up there at the minute.

GENERAL LLOYD. Anything else?

ST. AUBYN. I don't think so, sir. Terrific heavy shelling of our back areas by the Boche, of course.

GENERAL MALLORY (*muttering*). It's bad. Or, rather, it's not good. If they've failed over Tunnel, Harwood'll have to begin attacking again immediately. It can't be helped.

GENERAL LLOYD. No, sir. (*They withdraw to the back of the room, talking.*)

DIGBY (*aside to ST. AUBYN*). Did you have good fun?

ST. AUBYN (*the aesthete*). It was marvellous! The finest barrage I've ever seen in my life! And they were trying some new smoke-screen dodge as well . . . great



columns of white smoke streaming up to heaven like a thousand volcanoes, or the fire round Brynnhilde's rock . . . and all with the early morning sunlight on it Good Lord, I shall write books or paint pictures or do something, after all this. It was *incredible!*

DIGBY. How's Smith?

ST. AUBYN. When we came down he went to have a bath, and he's in the air now testing a new machine. I'm going back to the squadron to get some more breakfast; and then lie on my back all day watching other people fly. Dig.

DIGBY. What?

ST. AUBYN (*seriously*). Dig, I say. I think we did all we could about that blasted Tunnel Trench. It would have been no good going on as we were.

DIGBY. My dear man. It was up to you to judge. About your brother.

ST. AUBYN. Eh? Ronny?

DIGBY. He's in the 33rd Brigade. It's now in the 27th Division.

ST. AUBYN. What? (*Pointing to the map.*)

DIGBY. He's there—in the show somewhere. I found it out last night, but I didn't ring you up. He'll be all right.

ST. AUBYN (*appealingly*). I say, Dig . . . it *can't* be . . .

GENERAL LLOYD (*from the back of the room*). St. Aubyn.

ST. AUBYN. Sir?

GENERAL MALLORY (*kindly*). You know this bit of the line pretty well, my boy?

ST. AUBYN. Pretty well, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. The Twenty-Seventh Division will probably be attacking again by now. They'll have had to, if what you say about Tunnel Trench and the redoubt is correct. You see?

ST. AUBYN. Yes, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. So what I want you to do now, is to go up again and have another look at it. You don't mind?

ST. AUBYN. No, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. At Tunnel Trench only, and the

redoubt. You see, you know better than the other boys how things last stood there. Your pilot all right?

ST. AUBYN. Quite, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. Go back to your squadron then, and ask Major Redfern, from me, if you can do this, will you? Not at once—it would be no good, but in half an hour. And then come straight back here.

ST. AUBYN. Yes, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY (*hesitating*). Er . . . it's important . . . important that you should . . . see quite clearly this time, if you can. You see, my boy?

ST. AUBYN. Quite, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY (*nervously*). Good. (*To GENERAL LLOYD.*) Have you had any breakfast yet, Lloyd?

GENERAL LLOYD. Not yet, sir. I don't think . . .

GENERAL MALLORY. Oh, come along. (*To ST. AUBYN.*) Where were you at school, my boy?

ST. AUBYN. Carnarvon, sir. Rather a hole.

GENERAL MALLORY. A good school. Many years ago?

ST. AUBYN. Ages, sir.

GENERAL MALLORY. Well, be on the line in about half an hour from now. And then come back here when you've finished. General Lloyd will see you if I'm out.

ST. AUBYN. Right, sir.

[GENERAL MALLORY and GENERAL LLOYD go out.]

ST. AUBYN (*relaxing*). Is that the Corps Commander?

DIGBY. What d'you think of him?

ST. AUBYN. I'm going up in the world—hobnobbing with all these knuts! I wish old Smit had been here. But I *will* not smoke ration cigarettes. (*He throws away the one he has been carrying in his hand.*) Perhaps I ought to have pressed it between the leaves of a book, though—being from a Corps Commander—like a rose from her hair after the ball. Never mind. What sauce of him, telling Redfern who to push up into the air. (*Serious again.*) I say.

DIGBY. What?

ST. AUBYN. I say. I wonder if my brother's having as hellish a time as it looked, down there on the ground. You know, when one's in the air looking down at it—the crumps churning up the ground and the general

carnage—it all looks small . . . like seen through the wrong end of a telescope ; and one's got one's own job to take one's attention off . . . and one hasn't time to think. I didn't know he was down below.

DIGBY (*bitterly*). And we, back here, who've got nothing to take our attention off?—do you think it doesn't all seem a Bedlamite tragedy to us?

ST. AUBYN. I never thought of it being bad for you.

DIGBY (*touching his red tabs*). It's the price we pay for these cursed things, I suppose.

ST. AUBYN (*after a pause*). Well, it can't be helped. My bath and breakfast seem indefinitely postponed. I've had one already this morning, but I'm all sticky with the heat again. I must be popping off, if his nibs really meant what he said. So long. Smit will curse.

[*The YOUNG OFFICER comes back into the room.*]

YOUNG OFFICER. The Gunners say they'd like any messages we've got, sir. (*Seeing ST. AUBYN.*) Good morning.

DIGBY. A drink before you go? Barry, take him across to the Mess and give him a drink.

ST. AUBYN. No thanks, sir.

BARRY. Just a spot?

ST. AUBYN. Couldn't, thanks. I'm practically a T.T.—never touch alcohol before breakfast. Goodbye, Dig, see you later.

DIGBY. Goodbye. My love to Major Reddy.

[*ST. AUBYN goes out, but puts his head back inside the door to leer and wink at DIGBY. His car is heard starting up and departing. DIGBY goes to the window and remains resting his arms on the desk. The telephone rings. DIGBY remains where he is. It rings again.*]

DIGBY (*his head down on his arms, to BARRY*). Answer it, answer it, can't you?

(*Curtain.*)

## ACT II

### SCENE III

*Scene:—The Flying Corps Mess late the same afternoon about five o'clock. GAYTHORNE, the Canadian pilot and his OBSERVER are playing poker at a side table near the window, in shirt sleeves and with flying boots on. Another MAN sits in an armchair (centre) reading a magazine.*

*The remains of tea are on the big table. One or two leather coats and flying helmets are lying about the room.*

*Over everyone and everything there is an air of jadedness and fatigue as compared with a few hours ago or the evening before.*

*The OBSERVER has just finished dealing.*

GAYTHORNE. Last hand. (*Looking at his cards.*) Happy.

OBSERVER. Dealer takes two. Your shout. This room's like an oven.

GAYTHORNE. I'll make it a franc.

OBSERVER. Two.

GAYTHORNE. All right. And three better. Perhaps that'll teach you.

OBSERVER. Ten.

GAYTHORNE (*retrenching*). Ten? Ow, come off it. You don't mean that?

[*The OBSERVER nods.*

GAYTHORNE (*throwing down his cards*). Then I'm away. Gee, I can't stay in on a pair of deuces. You're about fifteen francs up in all.

OBSERVER. About. I can't see the damn cards any longer. We must have been playing for hours.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. Since lunch-time.

GAYTHORNE. Haf' after five now. (*Crossing to the tea-table and pouring out tea.*) Say, this dope's all stewed and cold.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. Half-past five. I say, I've never seen so many of our scouts on the line as to-day. The air was full of them.

GAYTHORNE (*sardonically*). Maybe they'd lost their way. (*Crossing to the notice board and looking at his watch.*) We perform again in about half an hour, Pudgy.

OBSERVER (*playing Patience by himself at the table, without looking up*). All right.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. Tunnel Trench again?

GAYTHORNE. I guess so. All the darned day there's been a fuss about that place. We had it by eleven o'clock. Then we were counter-attacked out of it. Then we nearly got it again. And when Pudgy and I go up, I bet it'll be to see what's doing there now—and the whole place so blown to pieces you can't see which is trench and which isn't. Pity the poor stiffs down there on the ground.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. Those new Dolphin buses are no good.

GAYTHORNE. They're fast.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. A damned sight too fast. Their engines go dud and their people can't land them.

[CARRINGTON *comes into the room, hot and worried.*

CARRINGTON. Hullo. God, what a day! (*He wipes his brow.*) You've heard that Summers and Martin were down all right?

[*He helps himself to cold tea.*

What filth is this!

GAYTHORNE. Summers and Martin? Good business.

CARRINGTON. They got shot up, but they managed to land in our support line. The 19th Brigade have just telephoned through. Martin was hit, but not badly, they think.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. Why can't the Infantry leave Tunnel Trench alone for a bit?

CARRINGTON. I don't know. They can't. It's a key position or something. I suppose they'll go on at it till the whole wretched division's wiped out. What time are you due to go up, Gaythorne?

GAYTHORNE. About six, you said, skipper,

CARRINGTON. Look here, could you make it a bit earlier? Now? It'll save another patrol. They're expecting a counter-attack away on the left, and want us to have a machine in the air. There'll have to be another special effort over Tunnel Trench later, and I'll get somebody else to do that.

GAYTHORNE. All right, skipper. Say, we're out of luck to-day, aren't we?

CARRINGTON. It won't last, at this pace. Look out for movements behind their lines especially, and report it. The wireless still in your machine?

GAYTHORNE. Sure.

CARRINGTON. All right, then. Get off as soon as you like. It's rotten luck about Smith.

GAYTHORNE (*unemotionally*). Bloody. Come on, Pudgy.

[GAYTHORNE and his OBSERVER go out. Another OBSERVER comes into the room.]

THE NEW OBSERVER. Any more news about Smith, did you say?

CARRINGTON. What more news could there be? St. Aubyn went down to the C.C.S. with him an hour ago. But what good's a Casualty Clearing Station to a corpse?

NEW OBSERVER. He was quite done?

CARRINGTON. Shot in about six places. St. Aubyn'll be no good for anything after this.

THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR. They were always about a lot together.

CARRINGTON. They eat together, and fooled about together, and always went on as though they couldn't live without each other. Smith even taught him to fly the machine; and that's how they got home to-day after Smith was hit. It's rotten luck for them both. But it can't be helped.

[ST. AUBYN comes into the room, his face quite grey, moving slowly, his voice emptied of its tone. He is ten years older than in the morning.]

ST. AUBYN (*looking round*). Hullo. (*He sits wearily in a chair.*)

CARRINGTON. Didn't you get as far as the C.C.S.?

ST. AUBYN. He died on the way. (*Heavily.*) I thought I'd better come back here.

## TUNNEL TRENCH

CARRINGTON. How . . . how are you feeling?

ST. AUBYN (*quite tonelessly*). All right.

[THE MAN IN THE ARMCHAIR and the OBSERVER get up and quietly leave the room.]

CARRINGTON (*shifting from foot to foot*). I'm awfully sorry. I'm awfully sorry for him. He was a first rate man. . . .

ST. AUBYN (*as before*). He was.

CARRINGTON (*hurriedly*). I must get on and push that patrol up into the air to see about Tunnel Trench. There's another war on about it. We're so damned short-handed now. Evelyn'll have to go.

ST. AUBYN. Who'll he take with him?

CARRINGTON. I don't know. Anybody he can get, I suppose. I should go and lie down and rest.

[*He goes out.* Pause.]

ST. AUBYN (*shouting feebly*). Grace!

[GRACE appears.]

ST. AUBYN. Go . . . go and get me a bath. Go on. And then I'll go to bed.

GRACE. Mr. Smith, sir?

ST. AUBYN (*without any feeling*). Mr. Smith is dead.

GRACE (*quietly*). I beg your pardon, sir.

[*He goes out.* ST. AUBYN is left alone.]

ST. AUBYN. I'm tired. . . . "The crown o' the earth . . . my Lord." . . . What are we going to do to-morrow? Smit! Smit! O, my dear. (*He puts his head in his hands, and sobs.*)

[MAJOR DIGBY appears at the door.]

DIGBY. I heard, at the Corps. It was a good effort of yours to get him down like that.

ST. AUBYN. Was it? I don't think I'll fly again.

DIGBY. How many months have you done out here, this time?

ST. AUBYN. Just over six.

DIGBY. Could you go home when you liked—now?

ST. AUBYN. I could have gone a month ago.

DIGBY (*hesitating*). How did it happen this morning? A shot from the ground?

ST. AUBYN. Not that. I don't remember. Yes, I do. It was a Hun two-seater; he had us cold.

DIGBY. How do you mean?

ST. AUBYN (*slowly*). We were high up. Somewhere above Schwaben. I was using my field-glasses. Smit was looking down over the side as well. The first thing I knew, the other aeroplane, the Hun, was diving on us.

DIGBY. Didn't Smith see him?

ST. AUBYN. Smith got a bullet in his shoulder and a bullet in his leg first go off, before he knew anything else. He kicked the machine into a spin . . . and we went down and down and down. . . . The Hun didn't chase us.

DIGBY. Were you hit?

ST. AUBYN. Not I. . . . And then we proceeded to get back. . . . I saw that Smith had fainted—he was hit in other places as well, and had fallen right forward in his cock-pit—and I caught hold. He'd taught me to fly. I could fly the machine on my own. I could even make good landings. . . . I flew it back half-way home . . . and then he recovered and took on for a bit . . . and then I brought it in and landed it. . . . But it was no good. No good. . . . He had managed to fly it himself for miles of the way, all shot to pieces, because he thought it would be saving me. He went on till he was almost dead. Dig! He kept his head clear . . . he tried to help me land. He brought my own carcass home when I'd have given my own life's blood to have done the same for him. . . . (*With a cry.*) What am I to do for him now? Dig, what am I to do for him now!

DIGBY. Quietly. Quietly. Did you like him so much?

ST. AUBYN (*fiercely*). I can't go quietly. I won't go quietly. Do you think you know what we were to each other?

DIGBY. You hadn't known him long?

ST. AUBYN. Five months. Five months—not of this, murders and massacres—but five months of summer—flying together, swimming together. . . . And, Dig—

DIGBY. Yes.

ST. AUBYN. It's too absurd to say it; but I was *older* than him. His brain was just awakening, just unfolding, just beginning to take an interest in things.



Dig, d'you know what it is when someone you know very well begins to use the same sort of phrases you use . . . to gradually grow into and become like you . . . to accept your ideas. . . .

DIGBY. Oh, Bill.

ST. AUBYN. Yes, it was almost as if he were my son. I was so much older than him . . . and, God forgive me, he thought such a lot of me. And now . . . because he's so young, because he'd have made so magnificent a man . . . he's gone and got pipped off, gone and got shot up, as if he were so much carrion, so much rubbish to be chucked away out of the world, before he'd lived, before he'd loved. . . . Dig, I wish the world had died in torment before this bloody war had started. I'm going mad. I don't know what to do. . . .

DIGBY (*quickly*). Go home now. Go home to-morrow morning if you can. Stop this infernal game while you've got a chance. You *must*. I've come to tell you. . . .

[*The voice of CARRINGTON is heard just outside the door, disputing with a Canadian pilot, EVELYN.*]

VOICE OF CARRINGTON. My dear chap, why don't you take him? He's all right.

VOICE OF EVELYN. I'd sooner have a sack o' pea-nuts in the back of the machine than him. He's no damn good, I tell you.

CARRINGTON (*comes in hurriedly and crosses to the notice board*). Well, you can take Wilmot then. No you can't. He's only just down out of the air. I don't know who you jolly well *can* take. Jeffries? . . . Arkell? . . .

ST. AUBYN. What's the matter?

CARRINGTON. Nothing to do with you. Evelyn's got to go up and do the last contact . . . at once. There's the final effort over Tunnel Trench now on. You can hear the barrage if you listen; the wind's the right way.

[*There is a moment of dead silence while they listen to the faint rumble of firing 15 miles away.*]

He won't take Crawford as his observer.

ST. AUBYN. There's me.

EVELYN (*a fierce, sandy little man, looking at him quickly*). All right. You'll do.

CARRINGTON. Don't be a fool.

ST. AUBYN (*to EVELYN*). How soon d'you want to start?

CARRINGTON (*shouting*). Shut up, I say. D'you hear? Shut up. I'm running this bloody flight—not you. If I thought you'd be any good, I'd send you at once. But you're not. You're almost out of your mind.

ST. AUBYN (*also shouting*). What if I am, you fool? What does it matter? What does anything matter now? I'm your most experienced observer. I know that blasted Tunnel Trench backwards by heart. Can't you see I want something to take my mind off Smith? Can't you see? Let me go, or I'll cut your heart out, and be damned to you. (*Shrieking*.) Will you let me go?

CARRINGTON (*shrugs his shoulders, to EVELYN*). Would you take him?

EVELYN (*quickly to ST. AUBYN*). I'm going to run my nose along that trench as low as ever I can go, barrage be damned. We've had enough mucking about for to-day. Will you come?

ST. AUBYN. All the better. Hold on a minute. (*He collects himself*.) Has your bus got a gun in it?

EVELYN. Crawford's gun.

ST. AUBYN. I'll use his then. (*Looking round the room*.) I must get my things.

CARRINGTON (*mutely appeals to DIGBY*).

DIGBY. Give me a minute with him. I've something to say to him, alone.

ST. AUBYN. The last word's said.

CARRINGTON (*hesitating*). There isn't much time . . . to get anyone else.

DIGBY. Please.

EVELYN (*to ST. AUBYN*). I'll get the wireless put in the machine and wait for you. Buck up. I can't wait long.

[*He and CARRINGTON go out, CARRINGTON as usual worried and shrugging his shoulders.*]

ST. AUBYN (*turning on DIGBY*). What is it? I've got a devil in me now that would make me go, if you told me I'd get shot up the second I left the ground. What is it?

DIGBY. You can't. You mustn't. I ask you. I've got something to tell you—that I came here for. Ronny . . .

ST. AUBYN. Eh? You mean Ronny's hit?

DIGBY. His battalion . . .

ST. AUBYN. Yes?

DIGBY. At a dressing station I saw his colonel. Oh, I don't know details yet. Only his Company . . . didn't get there. The whole wave he was in withered up, before they got to the wire. I don't know where he was last seen. . . .

ST. AUBYN (*relentlessly*). He may be only wounded.

DIGBY. Only wounded?

ST. AUBYN (*shouting*). What are you tormenting me or about this now? On my own job? *Our* job—Smith's and mine? What do you want me to do? Where's the help for it? I haven't seen him for the last two years . . . and Smith I left an hour ago! Leave me alone. (*With a gesture round at the empty mess room.*) There're only these people in the world for me to-day.

DIGBY. Ronny . . . your brother . . .

ST. AUBYN. And Smith was something more than that. Let me go back to the place where that blasted Hun got into us. Two years! . . . I tell you that: the last word's said. How do I know that I should even know him—after two years—to-day? Here, I must go. Get out. (*He tries to shove past Digby.*)

CARRINGTON (*at the door*). If you don't get off now. . .

ST. AUBYN. Coming. (*To Digby.*) Goodbye, old thing. I . . . I'll chuck off later. Thanks all the same. I'll be all right.

matter now? " I'd better be getting back to the Corps. Ring me up when he comes down. Will you do that?

CARRINGTON. If you like. Forgive us making fools of ourselves like this. Goodbye, sir.

DIGBY. Goodbye.

[*He also goes. CARRINGTON stands hesitating and then goes over to the notice board, and begins biting his nails in front of it.*]

CARRINGTON. Grace!

[*GRACE appears.*]

GRACE. Where's Mr. St. Aubyn, sir?

CARRINGTON. In the air. About dinner to-night. . . . You'll have to hold it till late again, till about half-past eight, and for every night for a long time after this. We'll be about four men short to-night in any case. Mr. Martin's hit. Get his kit packed up. He'll need it in hospital. Get Mr. Smith's together as well. No; Mr. St. Aubyn'll want to do that himself. God! I'm tired. (*He sinks down in a chair.*)

(*Curtain.*)

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*A shell-hole in the churned-up waste in front of Tunnel Trench. About 11 o'clock the same night.*

*The inside of the shell-crater is seen by the audience ; the walls slope upwards for seven or eight feet, and beyond them is a line of posts and fantastic curves of barbed wire silhouetted against the night sky.*

*The sky is full of the light of an unseen moon.*

*There is a lull in the battle and everything is quiet, except that at intervals of two minutes or so there is the sound, very far off, of a single heavy shell bursting—one of our howitzers at work on some distant objective behind the enemy lines—a low rumble mixed with a metallic sound, like a sack of coals being dropped on to corrugated iron two streets away—faint enough to be only just perceptible.*

*There are three figures in the shell-hole, two lit by moonlight, the third partially in shadow. One of them is obviously a corpse, huddled at the bottom. The second is the elderly GERMAN of the night before, lying back with his eyes closed. The third is RONNY ST. AUBYN.*

*There is again heard the low sound of the shell in the distance.*

RONNY (*muttering to himself restlessly*). Hasn't that how. finished it yet? What's it doing? Shelling a Hun cross-roads—knocking out some transport horses? Why doesn't someone come to see me? Am I to stay in a rotten shell-hole all night? Why should I lie down upon the brown earth. . . . I'm so damned thirsty. Go on, how.; shoot 'em up some more. I can wait and I can listen. I can time it now: Whump! . . . Whump!

you bloodthirsty swine. You'll pop again in a minute. Why doesn't someone come . . . someone I can talk to. . . . Wait a minute. You're nearly due. . . .

*[He waits and listens, and again the distant shell-burst is heard.]*

*(Shouting.)* Ah, you devil. Why should I be alone? Why isn't somebody here? Mummy, don't be so long. *(Coming more to himself.)* Hi! Why can't I move? *(Seeing THE GERMAN lying back motionless.)* Hi! Who are you? Can you say things? Would you like to talk?

*[He gently props himself to a sitting position and then weakly strikes out at the leg of THE GERMAN to attract his attention. THE GERMAN does not move, but screams.]*

RONNY *(drawing back)*. So you're not dead, aren't you! I thought we all were. . . . *(Then slowly, urgently.)* Water. Have you got water?

THE GERMAN. Wie, bitte? Was ist's?

RONNY *(urgently, insistently)*. Water. Water. Water. My water bottle's gone. I'm sick with thirst.

THE GERMAN. Warte nur. Vielleicht . . . vielleicht.

*[Without moving himself more than he can help, still lying on his back, THE GERMAN very gradually feels for and extracts his water bottle from his equipment and hands it in RONNY's direction. RONNY leans forward a little and manages to take it. He holds the bottle in his hands a long time, looking at it, and then puts it down beside him.]*

RONNY. Not for me . . . yet. Your leg's hit, I suppose. *(Wandering.)* I say, I say. Did you see that one that crashed this evening, like a dragon-fly! Sunlight on it one moment like a dragon-fly, and down in splinters the next! That taught 'em something! *(He laughs and shouts.)* Go on, yer devils. Go on, yer devils. Go on, yer devils. And then the wire and us on it! *(Relapsing.)* Why doesn't someone come! Bill, why don't you come? Bill, why don't you come to me? *(Shouting.)* Why doesn't the dawn come!

THE GERMAN. Stehe still, mein kind.

RONNY *(noticing the water bottle and again touching it,*

hoarsely). I can't talk German. You'd better shut up. Thanks for this.

*[He still does not drink from it but pats it with his hand.*

*[The scene gets a little darker as the moon passes behind a cloud, and another figure, crawling along the ground, lowers itself slowly down the side of the shell-hole. It touches THE GERMAN, who again shrieks.]*

THE VOICE OF ST. AUBYN. Goddam! Christ! Who is it? *(He looks at the face of THE GERMAN.)* Sorry, damn you. Ver . . . verwundert?

THE GERMAN. Geschossen ins Bein. Kann's nicht bewegen.

ST. AUBYN. Sorry, sorry. I must have jumped on it. I must wait here till the moon goes down. Blast the corpses! O God, I'm tired. O God, at last! *(He crouches in an attitude of utter exhaustion in the centre of the shell-hole. Silence.)*

RONNY *(hoarsely, after a pause)*. What d'you say?

ST. AUBYN *(starting)*. Who's there? Who's this? Who are you?

RONNY. Aren't you Bill? and you've come?

ST. AUBYN. What?

RONNY *(without moving)*. I didn't dare believe it. But when you spoke to him and said, "Sorry, sorry," and I heard your voice. . . . O my God, this is good. Come very near. I can't move.

*[ST. AUBYN leans towards him, and RONNY reaches backward for his hand and begins fondling it.]*

Why have you been so long? It's after lock-up.

ST. AUBYN. Are you hit? *(Looking at his face closely.)* Are you, Ronny? . . . What do you mean, about "so long."

RONNY. I'm hit . . . in the stomach, somewhere. I thought you'd come. Oh, everything's all right now.

ST. AUBYN. What can I do? . . . if you are Ronny. . .

RONNY. Nothing . . . but be here. *(Nodding at THE GERMAN.)* He's hit as well.

ST. AUBYN. Got his leg broken, he says.

RONNY. I'm so hot. Was it you that crashed in the aeroplane?

ST. AUBYN (*after a minute*). Then I can give him this coat. . . . Yes, I crashed. Don't move, dear man. (*To THE GERMAN.*) Here! . . . Kalt? Wollen sie diesen Rock haben?

THE GERMAN. Ich danke sehr.

ST. AUBYN. I'm hot too. Here you are. (*He arranges his flying coat clumsily over THE GERMAN, muttering.*) I suppose he *would* be cold. Ronny! . . . God! what does it all mean? Is it really you, Ronny? And all hit like this.

RONNY. Oh, I'm glad you've come.

ST. AUBYN (*bending over him*). In pain?

RONNY. Only a little. Less now than it was, my dragon-fly. Bill?

ST. AUBYN. Yes?

RONNY. Bill, ought I to drink this? (*Touching the water bottle*). I'm awfully thirsty. Ought I?

ST. AUBYN. I don't know.

RONNY (*restlessly*). How did you get here? Were you the outfit that crashed here late in the evening?

ST. AUBYN. I was doing the final contact over Tunnel. A shell burst in between our wings.

RONNY. Then what?

ST. AUBYN. We hit the ground. The man I was with was killed. Is that Tunnel Trench over there?

RONNY (*weakly*). Yes. Yes. Over there. I say, Bill.

ST. AUBYN. What?

RONNY. Do you know if I can drink? Do you know if it's safe or not?

ST. AUBYN. Why not?

RONNY. When one's hit here . . . I've heard one oughtn't to drink if one can help it.

ST. AUBYN. D'you want to awfully?

RONNY. Awfully. My tongue's . . . all black. But perhaps I oughtn't to. I've been saying to myself I oughtn't to drink . . . to be on the safe side.

ST. AUBYN. Do you want to get through? You're not badly hit, or you wouldn't be talking, dear man.

RONNY. No, no, I'd be all awful, instead of feeling rather jolly, wouldn't I? What a joke. (*He laughs*



*shrilly.*) Yes, I want to get through. Good God. There're people . . . millions of people . . . people. . .

ST. AUBYN. Is it people one wants to stay for?

RONNY. People . . . to do things with them . . . to have a good time with them when all this is over . . . to bathe, to hunt with them . . . to go up the river next year, in white flannels . . . with all the filth and squalor washed away . . . forgotten . . . at peace. . .

ST. AUBYN. I've lost my person.

RONNY. Would a drink hurt me? Surely not. . . . *(Suddenly, with a cry.)* Bill, I don't want to die. I'm terrified of death, now. All the last two years I've been messed about . . . filthy, filthy, filthy. I've had none of the nice things of life . . . clean sheets . . . good company . . . men who didn't swear and talk filth . . . women who knew one was a gentleman. I'm not fit to go like this, so far off, so alone. You don't know what it is; you're clean . . . you still smell of soap. I've shaved in tea, and lived on dishwater. I'm filthy to the core . . . and I can't die now, away from everything I love.

ST. AUBYN *(supporting him in his arms)*. Go off to sleep, dear man. You'll be all right. When the moon's down I'll get you back.

RONNY. You can't move me. I can't stand it.

ST. AUBYN. In the morning then.

RONNY. In the morning. . . . To-morrow! There'll be barrages starting up, and the Huns will put counter barrages down. . . . All over again! Over this exact part of the ground where our people will be passing. They're all round here, everywhere. To-morrow . . . and for weeks and months to come. . . . *(He stops speaking.)*

ST. AUBYN *(in an outburst)*. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow! How long will this go on? For ever? And every day till now has led to this. And every day from now still leads to it . . . madness, misery, and dusty death, with boys dying of thirst, with their courage taken from them. Ronny, you want to live. I don't.

RONNY *(suddenly, high and excitedly)*. It's September,

isn't it? Horses! Are the cavalry going through this time? They ought to be! (*Weakly.*) I wonder why.

ST. AUBYN. I don't know, dear man. Not for weeks yet, anyhow.

RONNY. Not for weeks? That's a pity. (*Coming back to himself and speaking more normally.*) Bill, dear man, there's something else. Something else. Ah yes; a man in our section—"Ole Bill," we call him—because of the moustache, you know. . . . I've always wanted to tell someone about him. Always . . .

ST. AUBYN. Yes, dear man?

RONNY. A type. . . . Millions of him . . . here . . . with the Germans . . . everywhere. And he's like all of them. He doesn't think. He can't think. He's got nothing to think with. Not like us, imaginative, able to see everything three times over before it comes. . . . But he's so *patient*. Yes, I admire patience. . . . What was I saying? Horses?

ST. AUBYN. Patient?

RONNY. Yes, patient. . . . Ole Bill. Year after year, year after year. . . . He grumbles, of course—that's part of it. . . . But about the real thing. . . . That awful fatalistic patience with it all! . . . the waiting. . . . D'you know, I swear that, by this time, he's got no more notion that he's got a right *not* to be killed . . . than he has of owning a deer park. And they turn it off, all of them, by grumbling at the food . . . at the sweat of it all . . . at the silly trivialities of it. D'you know what a woman—a woman of our class—said to me the last time I was in England, years ago?

ST. AUBYN (*still supporting him*). No, dear man.

RONNY. She said: "I wonder why all you young men dislike going out to France. You have a fine time there." Yes, she said that. . . . Why do we dislike it? . . . I didn't tell her. But I thought a lot. I thought: "Young men disliked going out to France because they might get killed there. . . . That they didn't like the sweat, the digging, the awful agonizing effort of doing the work of a soldier. . . . But that they liked it and loved it compared with the fear of death . . . of sooner or later getting killed . . . of going

away . . . to darkness . . . with the last months of their lives covered with lice and filth . . . the degradation, the shame, the loneliness. . . . Yes, I thought some of that. Are your people like that, Bill, in your lot?

ST. AUBYN. It's not the same with us. We're drugged . . . with the fun and excitement of it. Spoilt and pampered. And every few months we go home to England for a rest. It doesn't always happen with us like it happened to me to-day.

RONNY. What happened to you?

ST. AUBYN. I lost my pilot . . . the only person in the world for me. I've seen the war to-day. I don't know that I want to live.

RONNY. He was a friend of yours? (*Very low.*) Do you think I could have a drink?

ST. AUBYN. Can't you hold off, dear man?

THE GERMAN. Er sollte nicht trinken.

ST. AUBYN. What?

THE GERMAN. Nicht trinken.

ST. AUBYN. Sicher? (*THE GERMAN nods.*) He says no.

RONNY. I . . . I think I can stand it. You ought to live, Bill.

ST. AUBYN (*to THE GERMAN, touching the corpse at the bottom of the shell-hole with his foot*). Is he dead? Tod?

THE GERMAN. Er war, mein Freund . . . ein Junger.

ST. AUBYN. He's lost a friend as well, a boy. We've all lost friends. . . . I wonder how many to-day—three or four thousand? Enough, if all jumbled together, to fill up Piccadilly Circus as high as the housetops. Why ought I to live?

RONNY. Eh? (*Suddenly, sitting forward, speaking clearly and quickly and in an altogether different tone of voice.*) Because I'm not going to. I know it now. Give me some water, quickly. Quickly, or I can't speak. (*He drinks some water feverishly.*) Get out of the war yourself . . . get out of it. That's my idea! Never fight again! (*In ecstasy.*) It's September! They're cubbing in England now. Brown earth and bright sunshine! Thousands and thousands of beautiful horses, and clean, lovely ladies on them! Never fight again. (*High and excitedly.*) What's that? He's breaking cover. . . .

*[He suddenly sits almost upright, shouts, and then falls back quite limp. ST. AUBYN feels his hand, and then opens his tunic and feels his heart. Then slowly transfers the contents of the dead boy's inner pocket to his own, and says to THE GERMAN.]*

ST. AUBYN. He's my brother—brüder. Nineteen. Or was. Now he's as old as the hills. I'm too tired to go home. I'll stay with him. Yes, I'll stay with him. Are you having a good run, dear man?

*[He takes his brother in his arms, kisses him, and lies down to sleep by his side.]*

*[There is a pause and stillness. Then the sound of firing is again heard. Then, after again another pause, a figure in the dress of a Valkyrie of Norse legend, BRYNNHILDE, becomes gradually visible in a subdued glow of light. After another pause, she speaks.]*

BRYNNHILDE. I am Brynnhilde, Valkyrie and half goddess: a legend of both nations—of the single nation, that has been tearing itself to pieces on this plain to-day. My work is to bear the warrior home to Valhalla, after the end of battle. There are wide miles over which I have ridden. The shell-holes stretch from here across shattered hillside and bleak valley, thousands upon thousands, thousands upon thousands, locked and interlacing; and in how many of them my eyes behold this sight. . . . The war is near its end. Only months now, out of weary years, are left; but for many nights still to come I shall ride seeing this vision, still wrought afresh, day by day, by the hand of war; and I shall pass, and look for those I may take.

ST. AUBYN (*looking up and indicating RONNY*). Here's one already.

BRYNNHILDE. The boy?

ST. AUBYN (*glancing at the dead GERMAN YOUTH*). And another if you want.

BRYNNHILDE. And I am to take these, with all their secrets! For there are some who may come with me,

and some who may not . . . and some who will not. Are these of the kind whose right, or whose longing, is to mount to the hall of gods and heroes? To join their ancestors in the courts of the lord of war?

ST. AUBYN. Ask them if they wish.

BRYNNHILDE. I do not need. I know how they died—as many die in this last war of all wars: well, but not gladly; how they fought: fiercely, but with scorn of it in their hearts. These of my race are no longer of my race, and I no longer their goddess. It is for others that I seek.

ST. AUBYN. You'll find no better.

BRYNNHILDE. Others there are. But the race is near its end, passing as I shall pass, and they are few. There are to be no more gods such as I, and no more fights, and this is the death of us all. In the days of the legend my work was with these others, with those whose heart was in the fight, whose paradise was victory, and whose god the god of battles. These it was my work to take, to bathe their wounds and to crown with flowers, to lead to the high halls of feasting and song, where white maidens served them, and the glory of fighting well over made them one with the immortals. . . . But the world is older. . . . There are few of these now. There is nothing now that is triumphant, free from maladies of the mind and torturings of the soul. You fight because you hope to fight no more. You look to the peace beyond. I am no longer for you, and my work is done. . . . (*Her voice becomes compassionate.*) The boy here: what am I to him? He fought, not because he wished, but because the will of the old world was upon him and he was bent to its demands. He did not scale the ramparts of our heaven, shouting, with battle-blown hair, and ecstasy in his eyes. Joyless he went to death. . . . You must have fresh gods. Gods of the weak, gods of the battleground of Life: the flattery is over that you follow me and mine. And perhaps life is harder and more difficult than death, and its servants have longer to fight than those who measure courage by the sword. New gods, new gods. . . . And the old world with its splendours of might is passed, and the new world

is come with its ardours of endurance. And as I wander over the plain, some few I find who are mine; but if I declared myself to the many, they would deny me, and curse the gods of my house. These have missed the only paradise I can give them. These must wait till the rain and the dew have dissolved them into the teeming earth--dust to dust, and flowers to flowers--their rest in the end as their mother in the beginning. These have missed all the paradises. . . . The pride and glory of this modern race perishes in the earth, and comes no more to the Valhalla it has outgrown. Find new gods, and better if you can. Serve them, if you can, as well as we in our time have been served.

*{The light upon her darkens, and the curtain falls.*

[The Curtain goes up on the next scene, the Epilogue, with the least possible pause.]

## SCENE II

(Epilogue.)

Army Corps Headquarters. Midnight.

A partition divides the stage into two. On the right, the sitting-room of GENERAL MALLORY, the Corps Commander, brightly lit; a couple of deep armchairs, a large standing desk with maps pinned on it, lighted by a shaded reading light. GENERAL MALLORY and GENERAL LLOYD are talking together.

On the left of the partition, the ante-room of GENERAL MALLORY'S Aides-de-Camp, also brightly lit. Only one of the A.D.C.'s is in it, CAPTAIN PERRIS, a handsome young man in a beautifully cut uniform and red tabs, sitting with his chair tilted back looking at a magazine and smoking cigarettes. There is a tray with whisky decanters, syphons and glasses on a table.

GENERAL MALLORY. They say again the main operation can't start until we get up to there, to that exact point. The whole damned line are waiting for us . . . and will have to wait. There's nothing more to it.

[The telephone on PERRIS' table rings.]

PERRIS. Army Headquarters want us? Right. Tell 'em it's A.D.C. to General Mallory speaking. Put 'em through. (He waits.) Hullo. (Suddenly, his voice brightening.) Hullo-ullo-ullo, Bertie! Who'd have thought it! Your chief doesn't propose to dash round to us on another visit to-night? . . . Thank God for that. How's yourself? . . . (He waits and laughs. Then serious.) You want to talk business? Hold on a second; I'll get a pencil. (Transcribing.) "Army Commander Wishes To Congratulate All Ranks On Splendid Opening Of Attack To-day." Right. (Sarcastically.) Army Commander's heard about

Tunnel Trench, 'eh? No; we've not got it yet and we'll get it in about six weeks' time from now, I suppose. . . . Still; no harm in a message like that! . . . No; my chief's still discussin' the situation. . . . Probably he'll be up all night. . . . Good night, old bean. Good night.

*[He puts the receiver down, and then takes it up again.]*

Give me the head clerk. *(He waits.)* Take this telegram down. "Army Commander wishes to congratulate all ranks on splendid opening of attack to-day." Full stop. Address it to divisions. Get it sent out at once.

*[BARRY, the young officer in DIGBY's office in the morning, comes in carrying a large portfolio.]*

PERRIS. Hullo, Barry; what cheer?

BARRY. The Chief engaged?

PERRIS. You can't show him your everlasting aeroplane photographs, if that's what you mean. Have a drink?

BARRY. Thanks. *(Helping himself.)* D'you always have this stuff going at this time of night?

PERRIS. It's only Irish, I'm afraid. The Chief won't allow anything else to come inside the château. Look here, he's fatigued and bored to-night, and he doesn't want to see anyone else. Lloyd's been in there with him for the last two hours talkin' over the situation; and a footling message of congratulation that's just come through from Army Headquarters—the usual eye-wash—won't do him any good. He's tired. I should buzz off if I were you.

BARRY *(aggrieved)*. He always says he wants to see aeroplane photographs every evening. You'll be responsible if it turns out he really needs me with crying urgency?

PERRIS. I'll be responsible. Good night, old cock. Sweet dreams.

*[BARRY goes out. PERRIS begins writing.]*

GENERAL LLOYD. Harwood says he thinks his own casualties will run to about two thousand. But, of course, he doesn't know yet.

GENERAL MALLORY. The whole division will have to be relieved the day after to-morrow.



GENERAL LLOYD. Whitelaw's can be brought up to go in in their place.

GENERAL MALLORY (*thoughtfully*). Two thousand. . . . And we only started this morning. . . . We can give them a few days to recover, but we'll have to put them in again after that. It's the only way; short turns—never more than a few days at a time. It prevents the men getting their tails too much down. They—and all the rest—will be wanted before this show finishes.

GENERAL LLOYD. How long will G.H.Q. be able to hold up their main attack now that Tunnel Trench is giving us all this difficulty?

GENERAL MALLORY (*shrugs*). I don't know. . . . Yesterday it was a surprise for the Boche; to-morrow it won't be.

[PERRIS gets up and knocks on the door.

Come in Archie.

PERRIS (*entering*). Army Headquarters have just telephoned through, sir: "Army Commander congratulates all ranks," etc.—the "usual."

GENERAL MALLORY. "Congratulates all ranks," eh? (*There is a short silence.*) He was never famous for a sense of humour. Thanks, my boy.

[PERRIS retires.

There'll be more cause for congratulation before we've finished. . . .

GENERAL LLOYD (*after another interval, pulling himself together*). Well, sir; shall you go and see Harwood in the morning, or shall I?

GENERAL MALLORY. I don't know. . . . I think you'd better. Tell him that after to-morrow he can have a four-day rest, and then he'll have to be ready to go in again. Find out what battalions of his really got cut up to-day—if they were his best. I'd better stay about here. G.H.Q. may want me to go to them to talk about what's to happen next week.

GENERAL LLOYD. All right, sir. I'll get off early. There's nothing more to-night?

GENERAL MALLORY. I don't think so, Lloyd. I don't think so. Good night. Good night.

GENERAL LLOYD. Good night.

[GENERAL LLOYD *goes out, passing PERRIS, who is back at his magazine, and nodding to him. PERRIS takes his feet off the table.*]

GENERAL MALLORY (*coming to the partition door*). Good-night, Archie. The shop's shut for the evening. Tell anyone else who comes. Good night.

PERRIS (*looking up*). Good night, sir.

[GENERAL MALLORY *returns to his room, walks up and down it once or twice very slowly; mutters "Congratulates all ranks . . ."; turns off the reading light above his desk, and slowly goes towards the door.*]

(Curtain.)

September, 1923



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